

Reserve

REMARKS OF MARGARET HARRIS BLAIR, PROFESSOR OF CLOTHING AND TEXTILES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, AND CHAIRMAN OF EASTERN REGION COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CLOTHING TEACHERS, AT THE NATIONAL RETAIL DRY GOODS ASSOCIATION'S LUNCHEON IN THE PENNSYLVANIA HOTEL, NEW YORK ON SEPTEMBER 10, 1948, IN HONOR OF COLLEGE TEACHERS ATTENDING SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S SEMINAR ON CLOTHING AND TEXTILES

WHAT THE SEMINAR MEANS TO ITS MEMBERS

There could not have been a better way, it seems to me, to complete the Syracuse University Seminar, than with a Retailers' Day in New York. For after all, of all the people that we have had the privilege of coming to know in this Seminar, it is the retailer who is closest to us and with whom we are in almost daily contact in our work and in our personal lives.

The retailer, the teacher, the ultimate consumer have a common interest in the end product. The retailer to provide required goods for the consumer; the consumer to support the retailer through the purchase and utilization of goods; the teacher to interpret and create better knowledge, understanding and appreciation on both sides.

In this seminar we have sat around the table together, looked at the facts and problems with experts guiding us, and worked together for a better understanding of and a solution to the problems. That procedure, as you know, is really what a Seminar is.

In this Seminar the executives and technical experts in the clothing industry and retailing, have been the teachers. We who usually are the teachers were the students.

This is the first time that teachers have had the opportunity to get an over-all view of the flow of goods from the raw state to the finished garment made available by the retailer to the consumer.

Charges often hurled at teachers for inefficiency and lack of knowledge by people in the business world, show the need of contacts between educational personnel and industrial and retail leaders.

Since it is impracticable and often impossible for individual educators to gain entrance into many phases of the clothing industry, and to gain needed information, Doris Myers, associate professor of home economics in charge of clothing and textiles at Carnegie Institute of Technology, has in her work at Carnegie, Tech., brought people from industry and retailing to her students; and felt it was desirable to bring a group of people from industry to teachers as well as students, in order to achieve effective education in clothing and textiles.

Mrs. Edna Brandau, Associate professor of applied arts and director of merchandising at Syracuse University, who was teaching at Drexel Institute at the time, had a similar idea and invited twenty designers to come to Drexel for Designers Day to work with her students, although neither Miss Myers nor Mrs. Brandau had any idea what was in the mind of the other at the time.

When the conference of college and university clothing teachers of the Eastern Region of the country was held in Washington in May 1947, Miss Myers presented her idea. The teachers of that region enthusiastically endorsed it.

Clothing construction and design as taught in general, is removed from an understanding of what industry practices actually are. The teachers felt the need of such a meeting in order to evaluate their teaching and to know the direction it should take. They realized that there was so much to be gained from experts.

Mrs. Brandau was at the Washington conference and expressed a desire to work with Miss Myers on the project. They both were aware of the academic hurdles and financial obstacles that would have to be cleared, and worked unceasingly until they achieved their goal. I shall never forget the glow in Miss Myers face the first night of the Seminar after we had two excellent sessions, when she looked at me and said, "Thank heavens, she's rolling."

In September 1947, Mrs. Brandau and Miss Myers spent two weeks pounding the New York pavements interviewing people in industry and retailing. The result was both gratifying and encouraging.

So from the original idea of having only a handful of people, the Seminar was developed and its present proportions of scope actually achieved by these co-chairmen.

They were interested in having a Seminar offered in a college or university with the possibility of this developing into a graduate program.

Since there had been an expressed demand for planned graduate work in textiles and clothing for interpretation of the clothing industry, its contribution, its problems, its possibilities for college graduates, Dr. Annie Louise Macleod, Dean of the College of Home Economics at Syracuse University became interested, with the result that this University gave the Seminar a place in the summer offerings for graduate credit.

This Seminar as now planned would cost more money than the University had available. It was ultimately the retailers through the National Retailer Consumer Council who made the Seminar possible, and it was through their financial support that the plans of such a Seminar as Miss Myers and Mrs. Brandau had dreamed that it could be completed.

It was through the retailers and their association with the N.C.R.C. that this organization became interested and out of that grew a steering committee composed of the following: Miss Ruth Ayers, Director of the N.C.R.C.; Dr. Harry Barth, W.T. Grant Co., Fabric Buyer; Mr. Fred Hooson, Educational Director, J.C. Penney Company; Dr. Bertram S. Kaiser, Assistant to Vice-President, Allied Stores Corp.; Mr. George Schwartz, Merchandise Supervisor, Sears Roebuck & Co.; Dr. A. Frank Tesi, Assistant to Director of Merchandise, W.T. Grant Co.

Miss Ruth Ayers, Director of the Consumer-Retailer Council has had an important part in the Seminar, presiding at the afternoon sessions and acting as moderator at the round table discussion of the presentations for the week; and as consultant for consumer-retailer program planning.

Dr. Ralph E. Montonna, Director of Industrial Research at Syracuse University, presided at the week's presentation of technical data and was moderator for the Saturday session.

Miss Myers, and Mrs. Brandau wrote to Miss Beulah I. Coon, Agent for Studies and Research in Home Economics in the United States office of Education, who instigated the original regional conferences, and asked her opinion of the venture. Miss Coon not only endorsed the idea but accepted the invitation to attend a meeting of the Seminar.

She served as consultant in helping the teachers develop guides to performance standards of consumer goods, and in evaluation of the Seminar in relation to its implication to college teaching.

Because this was the first meeting of this kind, the co-chairman and the steering committee wished to cover the field as completely as possible. So, through their efforts sixty-three leaders in industry and retailing came to the University Campus and participated in the Seminar; and eighteen or twenty field trips were made possible in New York City.

The program showed fine organization of material and offered breadth and continuity that has created a stimulus for further information of similar nature. The association with the personnel of our own group around the tables in the dining room, and going to and from class, and in curb sessions in the dormitories, afforded an opportunity for comparison of notes on our own jobs and for clarification of ideas relative to subject matter and methods of presenting it in our class rooms.

The personnel of the program, as we said, were in number around sixty.

Since the Seminar was limited to fifty people we had the unique situation of more teachers than students. Included on the program were designers, executives, buyers, advertisers, and other leaders in retailing; chemists, converters, industrial and retail researchists, developers of synthetic fibers, salesmen, economists, directors of national institutes, directors of commercial bureaus of standards, market managers, directors of educational service bureaus, color coordinators, coat, suit, and dress manufacturers, executive of cloth mills, technical data coordinators, consumer relations directors, promotion directors, fashion directors, and editors. We wish we could name the people, the mills, the firms and houses represented but that would take too long.

In order that the Seminar should make a widespread contribution to educational progress in the clothing and textile area, it was desired that teachers representative of all regions of the country participate. Thirty states and Hawaii are represented. This personnel includes teachers of design, textiles, historic costume, construction, draping, pattern making,

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tailoring and retailing, there are researchists, department heads, members of all the professional ranks, an editor for a professional magazine and authors of text books.

This is not "just a bunch of teachers." Although we are all, in one way or another teachers of consumers of future consumers, we are a group of women of various ages, and geographical locations, of diversified training, background and work, who are making a sincere effort to help young women to be successful, happy and effective citizens whether their career is that of making a home or in the business world.

In many instances the teachers in order to attend the Seminar, devoted part or all of their vacation their summer teaching salary, and in addition those who came from a distance had to spend several hundred dollars from their regular salaries. In a very few cases colleges felt the importance of this program sufficiently to make it financially possible for a representative to attend, and some made adjustment in staff schedule to enable a teacher to come.

In this Seminar of four weeks we have made a concentrated effort to learn the problems and complexities of the producers and manufacturers, which knowledge will be reflected in the teaching programs in forty-five colleges.

The representatives of the business groups have been able men and have spoken with authority. They have been generous with their time and patient with our questions, which often must have seemed trivial to those who deal with thousands and even millions of yards of goods or articles of dress or accessories.

It is gratifying to us that industry often in these weeks manifested the desire to understand some of the scholastic objectives and problems in training the consumer.

We have been given a wonderfully clear picture of the over-all economic situation. We have had demonstrations on comparative values. With the material and outlines furnished us by the speakers and the material offered to us on request, I am sure that better programs in women's clubs and other groups in which we participate as well as in our classrooms will be more meaningful.

Many of our girls are eager to go into the business world after college. We have been eager to learn in what way we could improve the preparation of our graduating seniors in this direction. The designers, manufacturers, retailers and technical men on the Seminar programs through their suggestions have helped us materially with this problem.

We have gained much inspiration from the contacts which we have been privileged to make with the men and women who have worked with us and have given so much of their time and attention to help us especially in the case of Rosalia Zumpano who came, not just for a few hours, but for several days to actually work with us.

We feel that we can now read magazines and papers of the trade more intelligently. The Seminar has given us a better understanding of where to go to keep abreast of developments and trends in the clothing industry.

We feel that through the interest, cooperation and participation in this Seminar, you people have shown your respect for the clothing and textiles teacher. This, naturally, increases our faith in our programs and sends us back to our work refreshed and with increased confidence.

We have been made to feel that the producer and retailer desire knowledge of the needs of the consumer so that the effort and expense of production and presentation of goods may be made toward a gain or profit on both sides. The many suggestions for research to investigate consumer knowledge, practices and experiences, in which teachers and students in colleges and universities may participate have suggested others to us also, in carrying these out we would be enabled to make a contribution toward this end.

We are eager to do our part in improving relationships between consumers and retailers. It has been made clear to us that the consumer is often at fault in purchase and use of clothing which of course we already knew. But the only way that a consumer can make an intelligent purchase and use of an article is through knowledge of what she is buying, what to expect of it and how to care for it. Unless sales people are able to wish to give information to the customer, unless an informative label is on the article or clear cut facts are included in advertising, how can a consumer know that she will receive fair value in exchange for her expenditure of money? I am sure all of you here want her to have that fair value.

Although we must realize that there are some women who try to take unfair advantage of stores in the matter of returns, there are many women who shrink from going in with a complaint even when it is entirely justifiable lest they bring about an unhappy relationship or be classified as difficult customers. But unless she does, how can the retailer and manufacturer know whether his product is giving satisfaction? Women are constantly with groups of other women in professional, church and club work, around the bridge table, shopping, or chatting over the phone or over the back fence. Much of their talk is of the little things that make up their lives. They like to speak with pride about their good purchases and they "pull" no punches in telling about their unsatisfactory ones.

While the consumer of today may have more money than she had during wartime, she learned much in those lean years that make her a more critical and careful shopper. It is a false conception that she is better off financially. She is hungry for information and she needs to know where to go and how to proceed in order to buy the best of available articles so that she may get the greatest value for her shrunken dollar. Often good and poor values are side by side and can't be distinguished through the eyes or the fingertips. We know now that we can get buttons that won't melt, bolts that won't turn dark or break up when cleaned or laundered, linings that won't ravel out at the seams; that children's clothes may be secured that are sized to measure instead of to age, and infinite other improvements.

But where to find them and how to know them as such, is the problem.

We are hopeful that better labelling is on the way and that labels will be kept on the article, at least until it can be purchased. We hope that retailers will pass on to producers the dissatisfactions expressed by consumers. We know that there is much for consumers to learn in the use and care of goods, and that is part of our job. We feel that retailers could help, and many do, by aiming at educating the consumer, working with teachers - so that the teacher can do a job with them. Perhaps some means whereby an interchange of ideas among producers and merchandizers of goods, teachers, and the ultimate consumer, could be made possible. Is the National Consumer Retailer Council the avenue for this? We as a group feel the need of a clearing house.

The repeated offers by the representatives of industry and of retailers on our program here to send us teaching materials, and that which we have been receiving over a period of time, the trend in advertising toward informing the consumer of the construction and the fabric and the intended use, the offers to help form working committees composed of teachers and members of industry for the solution of problems, all assure us of a real desire to cooperate.

We have, of course, gained much factual information, some if it technical and related to specific phases of production and distribution some of immediate practical application to consumer problems; some to the over-all economic picture; and much that we can apply directly in our teaching.

More important, however, have been in the intangibles; 1) a greater appreciation and understanding of the problems connected with the textile and apparel industries and of the complexity of these problems due to the interdependence of all the factors involved; 2) a more acute consciousness of our responsibilities as consumers and as teachers in helping "to make intelligent consumers out of customers"; 3) a respect for the high calibre of these representatives of business; 4) a realization that while the manufacturers and retailer's zeal in perfecting his product or operation is based on the profit motive, the consumer also benefits from it in the long run.

How will we use the material and experiences we have gained at this Seminar? First it will be reflected in our teaching. It would be impossible for us to return to our jobs without reconstructing our plans and activities. We have learned some excellent teaching techniques from the well planned and organized presentations. Some teachers give a fussy and fuzzy presentation of material just as some wear fussy clothes and do not make a smart appearance. Most of our sessions were marked by the presentation of just enough material for the time allotted and in a clean-cut, clear, and interesting manner.

Second these experiences will be reflected in research throughout the country of the end use of clothing.

This first Seminar is only the beginning. Miss Myers and Mrs. Brandau have pioneered in bridging the gap between the clothing industry and retailers, and educational institutions. Much of our work is based on science and art and research as ours is. Why shouldn't business and education go hand in hand?

Another Seminar of similar nature is being planned for 1949 to 1950. All three will carry graduate credit at Syracuse University. We are all hoping to return; but since the number which can be accommodated is limited, some of us will send others in our stead so that they may receive the same inspiration for better teaching and for closer relations, understanding and appreciation of all phases in the continuing flow of goods.

We want to express our gratitude to the two women who felt the need, had the vision, and did something about it; to Dean Macleod and the University who housed us and put us on their roll, and to the retailers, and all the others who made the Seminar possible. We have had a wonderful time.

We hope that each of you will at some time be able to visit us in our various localities over the country. And as some of you have said to us, "If there is anything we can do to help, just call on us." We now say that to you.

